

**Julius Vindex and the *Histories* of Tacitus:
Memory, history, and imperial ideology**

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Discussions of the figure of Julius Vindex, the leader of the rebellion in Gaul, which led to the death of the emperor Nero and the rise of Lucius Sulpicius Galba to the principate, have been almost completely absent from Tacitean historiography. The primary reason for this is Vindex's physical absence from the Tacitean corpus — he never appears as a character in Tacitus's *Histories* or *Annals*, he is mentioned by other figures and the narrator only once in the *Annals*¹ and only 12 times in the extant books of the *Histories*.² Tacitus's seeming lack of interest in Vindex is explained partly by the vagaries of time: the very portions of the *Annals*, which would have narrated the events of Vindex's rebellion, have not survived to the present day. The surviving portions were scoured for insights into Tacitus's position regarding Vindex's intentions but have, never been comprehensively studied through a historiographical lens, at least to my knowledge. While these few mentions cannot give us a full perspective about Tacitus's opinion and evaluation of Vindex by themselves, we can use the mentions of Vindex to gain insight into Tacitus's general approach towards memory, history, and imperial ideology. Tacitus deliberately chooses to refrain from giving Vindex a physical presence in the *Histories* to demonstrate mechanisms by which different groups and, most importantly, the institution of the principate can instrumentalize, reimagine, and transform liminal figures in a bid to manipulate discourses of "Self" and "Other", Roman and Barbarian to achieve their respective ideological goals. The struggle between these different interpretations of belonging and exclusion ultimately forms a debate around what

¹ Tacitus, *Annals*, XV.74

² Tacitus, *Histories*, I.6, I.8, I.16, I.51, I.53, I.65, I.70, I.89, II.94, IV.17, IV.57, and IV.69.

constitutes the Empire, where power in the Roman Empire actually resides, and who gets to be a part of the narrative of imperial history.³

To understand adequately Tacitus's occlusion of Vindex from the narrative of the *Histories*, we need to first give a brief overview of what we know about Gaius Julius Vindex. For this, we are almost completely dependent on the accounts of Cassius Dio, Suetonius, and Plutarch. Julius Vindex was a scion of a royal family of Aquitaine and his father was a Roman citizen.⁴ He rose to the rank of *propraetor* in Gaul and revolted against Nero in AD 68.⁵ Instead of claiming the Roman principate for himself, Vindex offered the title of emperor to the governor of Hispania, Lucius Sulpicius Galba.⁶ Later, he was defeated by the German legions under the leadership of Verginius Rufus at the battle of Vesontio and committed suicide.⁷ However, the rebellion of Vindex set in motion events that led to Nero's suicide and the election of Galba as emperor.⁸

These events are not included in Tacitus's narrative, which begins on January 1st of AD 69. Tacitus's choice of starting narrative in AD 69 instead of, say, AD 68 has been given several explanations, but no scholarly consensus has yet emerged.⁹ What is important for this paper are the implications of the removal of the characters of Nero and Vindex from the *Histories*. In her

³ I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Andrew Feldherr, for his constant support in the preparation of this paper. His numerous insights and challenges to many of my positions served to refine my argument and to increase my own attentiveness in dealing with the historical evidence. It is in our conversations that I was able to flesh out my points on the importance of discussing Vindex as a figure in the *Histories* and that I was able to come to realizations about a number of points incorporated in this essay. Without his support, the analytical depth and coherence of the arguments of this paper would not have been possible.

⁴ Cassius Dio, *Epitome of Book LXIII*, 22,11.1². For a scholarly discussion of Vindex's life, see especially Peter A. Brunt, "The Revolt of Vindex and the Fall of Nero," *Latomus* 18 (1959): 531-559.

⁵ Plutarch, *Galba*, 4.2-3, Cassius Dio, *Epitome*, 22,11-23, and Suetonius, *Life of Nero*, 40.1.

⁶ Plutarch, *Galba*, 4.3-4, Cassius Dio, *Epitome*, 23.1, and Suetonius, *Life of Galba*, 9.2

⁷ Plutarch, *Galba*, 6.3, Cassius Dio, *Epitome*, 24.1-4, and Suetonius *Life of Galba*, 11.1.

⁸ Tacitus, *Histories*, I.16.

⁹ For a development of some of these explanations, see Thomas Cole, "Initium mihi operis Servius Galba iterum T. Vinius consulēs...," in *Beginnings in Classical Literature. Yale Classical Studies* 29, ed. Francis M. Dunn and Thomas Cole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 231-248 and Jonathan Master, *Provincial soldiers and imperial instability in the Histories of Tacitus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 115, note 51.

book *The History of make-believe: Tacitus on Imperial Rome*, Holly Haynes argues that, by removing Nero from the *Histories*, Tacitus presents “the gap between the unbearable “real” that is beyond language, symbolization, narrative, and therefore ideology, and the symbolically structured “reality” in which Roman society actually operates”.¹⁰ In other words, in removing the physical Nero from the *Histories*, Tacitus investigates the interpretations and reimaginings of the ideology of empire in the absence of its creator. Since Vindex is also not present as a character in the *Histories*, we can adopt Haynes’s approach to investigate similar concepts, including rebellion, identity, and the historiography of civil war.¹¹ To better understand the different uses of the figure of Vindex throughout the narrative of the *Histories*, we must also examine the way Vindex has been treated in ancient and modern historiography.

Vindex is described by Dio Cassius as a “Γαλάτης” —a Gaul.¹² But he is also characterized as a Roman senator (“βουλευτής τῶν Ῥωμαίων”).¹³ Plutarch mentions Vindex as “Γαλατίας ὄν στρατηγός” — a general/commander of/in Gaul.¹⁴ Meanwhile, Suetonius describes him as both a leader of the Gauls and the governor of the province: “Talem principem paulo minus quattuordecim annos perpessus terrarum orbis tandem destituit, initium facientibus Gallis duce Iulio Vindice, qui tum eam provinciam pro praetore optinebat.”¹⁵ These nuanced descriptions of Vindex seem to show us a figure occupying a liminal space between the Gallic and Roman world. Ever since the times of the Republic, only Roman citizens could occupy public office and could have political power. The incorporation of the Gauls as citizens and even as members of the Senate,

¹⁰ Holly Haynes, *The history of make-believe: Tacitus on Imperial Rome* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 35.

¹¹ I would especially like to thank Professor Andrew Feldherr for broadening my own thoughts about the relationship between Tacitean historiography and the figure of Vindex through this insight.

¹² Cassius Dio, *Epitome of Book LXIII*, 22,11.1²

¹³ Cassius Dio, *Epitome of Book LXIII*, 22,11.1²

¹⁴ Plutarch, *Galba*, 4.2.

¹⁵ Suetonius, *Life of Nero*, 40.1.

if we accept the text of the *Epitome* of Dio Cassius, was a controversial policy ever since Caesar and Claudius's time.¹⁶ And yet, here was a person of Gallic ancestry who chose to directly challenge a Roman princeps, accuse Nero of having "despoiled the whole Roman world" in the words of Dio Cassius,¹⁷ and proclaim another Roman governor emperor. What motivated Vindex to rebel and could he have chosen to take up the mantle of the principate himself, had he wished? The ancient authors do not give us a satisfactory answer. This dual identity of Vindex as a Gaul with Roman citizenship, a leader of a Roman province, and the commander of Gallic troops has similarly created disagreeing modern interpretations of Vindex's rebellion.¹⁸ That even scholars today are unable to agree on answers to basic questions regarding the identity and motivations of Julius Vindex shows us that there is no simple story that can be told of Vindex, either in the 1st or the 21st century AD.

This is why this paper will attempt to examine the implications of reading Vindex as a liminal figure that problematizes the very "Romanness" of the Roman Empire by precipitating the fall of Nero and the rise of Galba. The dual identity of Vindex becomes a potent tool for rhetorical interpretation because,¹⁹ by attempting to situate Vindex within Roman history, both ancient and modern historians have to indirectly deal with the question of what constitutes a Roman citizen or

¹⁶ I would like to thank Professor Andrew Feldherr for offering these thoughts to me in our discussions on the creation of this paper.

¹⁷ Cassius Dio, *Epitome of Book LXIII*, 22,11.3

¹⁸ These have focused on whether the main goal of Vindex's rebellion was the removal of Nero, the establishment of a renewed republic, or the independence of Gaul. For a survey of these positions, see, among others, Brunt, "The Revolt of Vindex", 531-559, D.C.A. Shotter, "Tacitus and Verginius Rufus," *The Classical Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (November 1967): 370-381, John Bryan Haines, "Verginius and Vindex," *Historia: Zeitschrift für alte Geschichte* XI (1962): 86-96, Ronald Syme, "Tacitus in Gaul," in *Ten Studies in Tacitus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 19-29, and M. Raoss, "La rivolta di Vindice ed il successo di Galba," *Epigraphica* 22 (1960): 37-151.

¹⁹ To appreciate even more the degree to which liminal figures can become an important part of the discourses of power, further comparative work should be undertaken that includes not only non-Tacitean discussions of Vindex but also references to other liminal figures in classical historiography, such as Civilis, Sacrovir, Sertorius, Arminius, Queen Zenobia, etc. Such an inquiry goes beyond the bounds of this paper but would be extremely valuable contributions to the literature on "Self" and "Other" in Antiquity.

a Gaul the Early Principate, a question which highlights tensions not only in the figure of Vindex, but also in the nature of the Roman Empire as a whole. Such questions would have been much more pertinent and urgent under the condition of the civil war of AD 69, described by Tacitus. Civil war is, by its very nature, an internal conflict that pits different viewpoints and interpretations of what notions like “Self”, “Other,” “power”, and “common past” actually mean. It is a state of ideological incoherence when establishing a common set of beliefs concerning these notions is the only way to restore stability and end bloodshed. And it is in this context that interpreting liminal figures like Vindex becomes extremely important and extremely powerful because they walk a dividing line between notions of “Self” and “Other”. The political actors in civil war who are able to create a coherent historical narrative of political legitimacy that successfully employs rhetorical tools like the figure of Vindex to frame conceptions like “Self” and “Other”, Roman and non-Roman stand to benefit from it.

Therefore, I would like to suggest that Tacitus’s interest in the construction, interpretation, and re-interpretation of imperial ideology leads him to use Vindex’s revolt, an event that would have ended a mere 6-7 months before the start of the *Histories*, as a test case for exploring how events in living memory could be interpreted and reinterpreted by different actors under the conditions of civil war in an attempt to create a historical narrative that serves to perpetuate or deny the ideology of empire. In studying the revolt of Vindex through this prism, we can catch a glimpse of Tacitus’s approach towards history and towards the difficulties of writing the history of a civil war.

As already mentioned, Vindex has been mentioned a total of 12 times in the *Histories*. A consequence of Tacitus’s choice to begin the narrative of the *Histories* on January 1st 69 is that Vindex appears only in the thoughts of others, their relationship to the past, and imperial ideology.

Of these, only 2 can be classified as mentions “in passing”.²⁰ Vindex is mentioned once in direct discourse, as part of Galba’s adoption speech to Piso²¹ and twice in indirect discourse (during Vocula’s speech to his legions and Julius Civilis’s appeal to the Gauls to revolt against the Romans).²² All other mentions of Vindex occur in indirect discourse, either as part of the narrator’s analysis of character motivations or in the narrator’s retelling of individuals’ or groups’ thoughts and actions.²³ The first cannot be used for the purposes of this paper. However, the words, thoughts, and motivations of individuals could shed more light on the way Vindex is perceived and interpreted in the *Histories*.

There is a clear difference in the way that Vindex is remembered and interpreted by three of the principal “groups” in the *Histories* — the Romans, the Batavians/Germans, and the Gauls. These interpretations are also mutually dependent. While they do not happen in the same location (people in Rome could not hear Vocula speak from the Rhine), they all are united by the questions that they address: What is the role of the principate in the Roman system? What is the place of the Gauls and specifically Vindex in that system? Who gets to define what “Romanness” is and how do the events of AD 68 help explain the present state of the Roman Empire? They are united also by the specter of civil war, which involves all of the citizens of the Empire in a common struggle for power, legitimacy, and peace. By examining every mention of Vindex in the *Histories* we can understand the different ideological viewpoints and their relation to each other. Let us start with

²⁰ This means that they do not, by themselves, serve a narrative purpose beyond establishing the circumstances of the arrival of the troops, recalled from the Caucasus, to Rome (Tacitus, *Histories*, I.6) and the previous posting of the troops, defecting to Vitellius in Northern Italy (Tacitus, *Histories*, I.70).

²¹ Tacitus, *Histories*, I.16.

²² Tacitus, *Histories*, IV.17 and Tacitus, *Histories*, IV.57.

²³ These include the German armies’ thoughts and motivations before proclaiming Vitellius emperor (Tacitus, *Histories*, I.8, I.51, and I.53), the explanation of the renewed hatred between Vienna and Lugdunum (Tacitus, *Histories*, I.65), the thoughts of the Roman plebs after civil war had broken out (Tacitus, *Histories*, I.89), the request of the German soldiers for Vitellius to execute three Gallic chieftains, who had fought for Vindex (Tacitus, *Histories*, II.94), and the explanation of the pan-Gallic decision, taken at Reims, to remain loyal to Rome (Tacitus, *Histories*, IV.69).

the Romans. The words of two Romans, Galba and Vocula, echo each other through their attempts to transform the memory of the recent past — the revolt of Vindex and the death of Nero — into a historical interpretation that suits the ideological goals of both figures.

Galba's speech in direct discourse has three primary aims: to differentiate Galba's regime from that of Nero, to consolidate Galba's power through the adoption of Piso, and to establish the principles of his rule.²⁴ Of course, all three aims require justification in recent memory. This justification should then come in the form of an interpretation of the past that can create a new ideological history to supplant the ideological model of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. The reasons for Galba's failure to create such a history are similar to the reasons for his failure to displace the *fingere/credere* dynamic, explained in detail by Holly Haynes,²⁵ that had been in effect since the reign of Augustus: "though he [Galba] intuits the political climate, which depends upon the notion of *libertas* as the lack of *vetus res publica*, [author's emphasis] he does not fully understand that changing it is not a matter of calling attention to it in order to announce something new".²⁶ In other words, Galba understands the need to overturn the ideological paradigm of Nero's reign together with Nero's death, but by calling attention to the fact that Galba's rule represents something new in comparison to the Julio-Claudian dynastic regime, he inevitably perpetuates the discourse and thus the existence of previous ideology in the minds of his listeners and so invites comparisons between himself and the Nero. To create an ideological framework for his regime, Galba has to create a narrative of the past that legitimates his coming to power and his right to rule.

²⁴ Haynes, *The history of make-believe*, 47-50.

²⁵ Haynes, *The history of make-believe*, 3-33.

²⁶ Haynes, *The history of make-believe*, 53.

And yet, Galba does not mention Vindex, who seemingly designated Galba to succeed Nero,²⁷ with praise for being a loyal servant of the *res publica*, nor with gratitude for his elevation to imperial power, but, instead he decides to focus on the arrogance and the subsequent inevitable downfall of Nero: “sit ante oculos Nero, quem longa Caesarum serie tumentem non Vindex cum inermi provincia aut ego cum una legione, sed sua immanitas, sua luxuria cervicibus publicis depulerunt...”²⁸ Galba tries to differentiate himself from the regime of Nero, but Tacitus sets Galba’s speech to fall on itself by seemingly diminishing Galba’s role in his rise to power. On the one hand, Galba dismisses himself as the leader of a single legion. In laying the blame for Nero’s downfall on Nero himself, Galba dismisses his agency as the leader of the principate and reveals his own shortcomings to the public by inviting the unfavorable comparison between himself and the deceased emperor.²⁹ He calls attention to the very fact that his rise to power was unexpected and unprecedented without realizing that this undermines his own political position. A reign without precedent is unknown, uncertain, and therefore unstable.

On the other hand, he diminishes the role of Vindex, whom he names simply the leader of an unarmed province, in the fight against the tyrant. In doing this, Galba fails to understand the importance of Vindex in both his own rise and in the perceptions of the provincial population in Gaul towards Vindex’s revolt, something the rebel Julius Civilis succeeds in exploiting to create his own version of imperial history, as we will see shortly. Thus, Galba is unable to create a historical justification for his power, precipitating the beginning of his downfall.

²⁷ Brunt, “The Revolt of Vindex,” 543.

²⁸ Tacitus, *Histories*, I.16

²⁹ Haynes, *The history of make-believe*, 54.

Another mistake is made by the commander of *Castra Vetera*, Gaius Vocula, in his own protests at the imminent betrayal of the German auxiliaries.³⁰ Holly Haynes has brilliantly shown how Tacitus construes Vocula's speech to fold in on itself from an ideological dimension due to, among other things, the failed use of Sacrovir and Vindex as examples of "gods' vengeance on behalf of the Romans."³¹ But there is an additional rhetorical and historical paradox in Vocula's speech that contributes to his failure and subsequent death. Vocula presents Vindex as a leader of all of Gaul, similar to Sacrovir, who had led a rebellion of the Aedui tribe against the emperor Tiberius, through parallelism: "Sic olim Sacrovirum et Aeduos, nuper Vindicem Galliasque singulis proeliis concidisse".³² In this way, Vocula attempts to present Vindex as a Gallic leader who was defeated in a single battle, and thus demonstrate that no rebellion in Gaul would ever be successful in destroying Rome.³³ This would presumably accomplish two goals very easily: deter the auxiliaries from joining a rebellion that will inevitably fail as every other rebellion before has failed and perform his duty as a functionary of the Vitellian regime by disparaging Galba as a Roman emperor elevated and assisted to power by Gauls. The latter goal can also be noticed in his attempt to place the blame for the present state of Germany and the Empire onto the shoulders of the now-dead Galba: "Galbam et infracta tributa hostiles spiritus induisse".³⁴ While these two ideological interpretations of recent memory may appear complementary, they are in fact mutually exclusive.

Firstly, Haynes is correct in pointing out that Sacrovir and Vindex "represent the precarious nature of Rome's claim to imperium."³⁵ However, there is more to Vocula's mention of Vindex

³⁰ Tacitus, *Histories*, IV.57

³¹ Haynes, *The history of make-believe*, 160.

³² Tacitus, *Histories*, IV.57.2: 3-4.

³³ Brunt, "The Revolt of Vindex," 544.

³⁴ Tacitus, *Histories*, IV.57.2: 6-7.

³⁵ Haynes, *The history of make-believe*, 160.

than Haynes acknowledges. Vindex, even in death, was successful in removing Nero from power. By bringing back the memory of Galba and Vindex, Vocula misunderstands the implications of his speech. Instead of showing Gaul to be helpless and permanently under Roman control, Vocula instead demonstrates how a Gaul not only intervened in Roman political affairs but, as an outsider, was the one to bring about the revelation of the *imperii arcano*.³⁶ An emperor was not made in Rome and an emperor was made by a Gaul. Not only does Tacitus make Vocula's speech fail on a rhetorical level — he writes Vocula's interpretation of recent memory in a way that undermines the very foundations of Roman ideology. Secondly, Vocula misunderstands his audience through his interpretation of Galba's assignment of rewards and punishments in the wake of Vindex's rebellion. The Gauls who had supported Vindex were the ones who were rewarded with a reduction of their tribute, while the Treviri and Lingones, who had opposed Vindex, were now in open rebellion against Rome.³⁷ Because of Vocula's loyalty to Rome and his affiliation with Vitellius, he can see both Vindex as a rebellious Gaul and Galba as a usurper. However, his audience could not understand such an interpretation of the past: it had fought for Rome and it had been sanctioned by a Roman. It was explicitly told by a Roman that a Roman emperor had sanctioned them. Just like Galba, Vocula tries to frame an ideological history out of events in recent memory by attempting to change political and historical discourse. However, he is blind to all of the different ideological implications of his speech and thus divulges the hypocrisy of Roman ideology, as articulated by Haynes: "enemies are those whom we treat as friends, and friends those we treat as enemies".³⁸ The inability of the Roman generals and emperors to create an interpretation of events within living memory in a way that can create a coherent Roman ideology, which can be

³⁶ Tacitus, *Histories*, I.4

³⁷ Guy E.F. Chilver and Gavin B. Townsend. *A historical commentary on Tacitus' Histories IV and V* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 69 and Brunt, "The Revolt of Vindex," 545, note 1.

³⁸ Haynes, *The history of make-believe*, 160.

understood and internalized by Romans, Germans, and Gauls, allowed Julius Civilis to attempt an interpretation of his own.

So far, we have been discussing memory, history, and ideology through the individualistic prism. However, for Tacitus, collective perceptions and decisions play an important role in precipitating and driving the events of the year 69. These would culminate with the start of the Batavian Revolt, led by Julius Civilis. Thus, to understand the implications of Civilis's speech, we must identify first the perceptions of the Gauls and Germans of the rebellion of Vindex. Tacitus focuses exclusively on the thoughts and feelings of the German and Gallic soldiers and provincials at a few points in his narrative.³⁹ At the start of his initial survey of the attitudes of the Roman provinces, the narrator asserts that "Galliae super memoriam Vindicis obligatae recenti dono Romanae civitatis et in posterum tributi levamento."⁴⁰ For the Gauls, the memory of Vindex is connected with the financial benefits, conferred on them by Galba. Thus, the Gauls are singled out as supporters of Galba, but, more importantly, as Roman citizens. By supporting Vindex, these Gauls have become Romans. The benefits that Galba conferred on the Gauls are, in themselves, not just financial rewards for loyalty, but are part of an attempt to integrate the Gauls into a coherent Roman ideology. As we have seen above, though, he fails to create an "official history" that can create a new ideological interpretation of his principate and replace the Neronian discourse. This means that the Gauls are left in a liminal space, not yet fully Roman because they have not yet received and internalized official history that will create an ideological discourse of the Gauls as Romans, and not fully barbarian, because of their receipt of the Roman citizenship.

³⁹ Tacitus, *Histories*, I.8, I.51-53, I.65, and II.94.

⁴⁰ Tacitus, *Histories*, I.8.1: 4-5.

However, the Gauls are not the only group that remembers Vindex: “Germani{ci} exercitus, quod periculosissimum in tantis viribus, solliciti et irati, superbia recenti victoriae et metu tamquam alias partes fovissent. Tarde a Nerone descriverant; nec statim pro Galba Verginius.”⁴¹ As we have hinted above in Vocula’s discourse, the state of the German armies after the rise of Galba is one of confusion. On the one hand, they are shown to be at the same time proud of their victory against Vindex, angered at Galba’s treatment of them, and afraid of having been on the wrong side. Their common interpretation of the events of Vindex’s rebellion is explained by the narrator in more detail later in Book I.⁴² In explaining the causes of Vitellius’s bid for power, Tacitus crucially focuses on the events that followed Vindex’s rebellion.⁴³ More exactly, the common experience of the Germanic auxiliaries in fighting Vindex allowed them to gain knowledge of their community: “tum adversus Vindicem contractae legiones, seque et Gallias expertae, quaerere rursus arma novasque discordias”.⁴⁴ In learning about themselves (“se... expertae”), they also are forced to differentiate themselves from the Gauls, whom they had fought, defeated, and now considered “nec socios, ut olim, sed hostes et victos...”.⁴⁵ In essence, the memory of Vindex is a memory of division between the Gauls and Germans. The first, as we have seen, received privileges from Galba, whereas the latter were punished. Therefore, as the Gauls are given a path towards Roman citizenship and integration into the historical narrative of Romanness through the rebellion of Vindex, the Germans are, conversely, forced into the opposite direction. And yet, the Germans were stuck in a state of confusion. Even if we accept that the troops did not feel “themselves to have saved Roman dominion”,⁴⁶ as Brunt asserts, they had

⁴¹ Tacitus, *Histories*, I.8.2:1-4.

⁴² Tacitus, *Histories*, I.51-53.

⁴³ Master, *Provincial soldiers*, 129-130.

⁴⁴ Tacitus, *Histories*, I.51.3:3-5.

⁴⁵ Tacitus, *Histories*, I.51.3:5-6

⁴⁶ Brunt, “The Revolt of Vindex,” 544.

fought under a Roman commander, Verginius Rufus. The narrator does not ascribe feelings of loyalty to the German auxiliaries, but they felt at least “favor” towards Verginius.⁴⁷ The removal of Verginius by Galba was felt by the Germans to be the straw that breaks the camel’s back. The feelings of pride, fear, and animosity united in hatred not only of the Gauls but of Galba himself. This is why they adopted the term “Galbiani” to refer to those populations which had received privileges from Galba and so they were responsible for their exclusion from the imperial narrative of the events of recent memory, events, in which they had played a crucial role.⁴⁸ The hate of Galba supersedes their hate of Vindex and thus they are forced to look for someone who can either reestablish the previous discourse or create a new historical interpretation of the past that will not erase the German auxiliaries from events that they had fought in. This desire for control of the process of transformation of memory into history and ideology motivates the Germans, notably the Treviri and Lingones,⁴⁹ to offer the principate to Vitellius.⁵⁰

What Vitellius offers to the Germans is the ability to exact full revenge on the Gauls, which is noticeable in the bloody march of Valens and Caecina through Gaul and especially their demands for the execution of Asiaticus, Flavus, and Rufinus for their participation in Vindex’s rebellion.⁵¹ Moreover, civil wars erode the boundaries between “Self” and “Other” in such a way that concepts like German and Roman become susceptible to rhetorical manipulation by leaders of opposing parties, thus widening the difference between the loyalties of different groups and

⁴⁷ Tacitus, *Histories*, I.53.3:5.

⁴⁸ Tacitus, *Histories*, I.51.3:8. This is similar in interpretation to Shotter, “Tacitus and Verginius Rufus”, 372 and contrary to Murison, who argued that the term *Galbiani* is due to the physical presence of Galba in Gaul during his campaign towards Rome (cf. Charles L. Murison, “The Historical Value of Tacitus’ Histories,” in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen II.33.3*, edited by Wolfgang Haase (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 1991), 1696, note 38.

⁴⁹ J. Gascou, “Tacite et les provinces,” in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt II.33.5*, edited by Wolfgang Haase (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 1991), 3464.

⁵⁰ Tacitus, *Histories*, I.53.

⁵¹ Tacitus, *Histories*, II.94.2

resulting in the “hybrid” appearance of the Vitellian army: “not Roman, but not foreign either”.⁵² The public, be it Roman or German, is unable to transform its collective memory into a common identity, because the principate has taken away the control of the people over the *res publica* and put it into the hands of the princeps. This is why they expect the princeps to articulate such a narrative. However, Vitellius remains mute throughout the entire book, without a single speech in direct discourse given to him by Tacitus.⁵³ He attempts to appear like a princeps, but he is never able to act or speak as a princeps, as Holly Haynes demonstrates: “Vitellius’s behavior is by its very nature an empty show, his character a cipher. The narrative eternally consigns Vitellius to a world of simulations, from which he never breaks free and which he does not understand.”⁵⁴ His lack of agency prevents him from making any consequential decisions regarding the historical-ideological interpretation of the events of recent memory. He fails to articulate any kind of interpretation of Vindex’s rebellion or the fall of Nero. This means that the narrative is left in the hands of the people who, as we have seen, are unable to produce a narrative of their own past. The only attempt at such an interpretation of the past is that of the citizens of Lugdunum, who tried to tie Vienne’s support for Vindex with non-Romanness and treachery.⁵⁵ However, this is prompted by the general animosity between the two towns, rather than a desire for reestablishing order. It is within this context of the inability of the Roman principate to create a coherent ideological history out of events in recent memory, the transformation of the Gauls into liminal figures, and the Germans as figures within a state of ideological confusion that we have to understand Julius Civilis’s speech in Book IV.⁵⁶

⁵² Master, *Provincial soldiers*, 138. I would especially like to thank Professor Andrew Feldherr for bringing this point to my attention.

⁵³ Haynes, *The history of make-believe*, 71.

⁵⁴ Haynes, *The history of make-believe*, 108.

⁵⁵ Tacitus, *Histories*, I.65

⁵⁶ Tacitus, *Histories*, IV.17

I agree with Holly Haynes that Civilis threatens Rome because of his ability to position himself within and outside of the structure of Roman imperium, blur the differences between “Roman” and “Other”, and create a different version of ideology.⁵⁷ His very name romanizes him and thus allows him the knowledge to be the “the only one, Roman or barbarian, who understands its [his ideology’s] full implications”.⁵⁸ And yet, I believe that Tacitus uses the argument of Vindex’s rebellion in a more complex way than Haynes does. Civilis does not simply state that Rome was successful in defeating Vindex because the Germans and Gauls were divided from each other and that they must now join to liberate themselves from Roman control, as has traditionally been argued.⁵⁹ He creates a complex ideological interpretation, a history of the events of the past year that aims to negate the divide between the Gauls and Germans that the revolt of Vindex and the conferral of Roman citizenship on the former by Galba opened. The most important part of his speech comes at IV.17.3:

Provinciarum sanguine provincias vinci. Ne Vindicis aciem cogitent: Batavo equite protritros Aeduos Arvernosque; fuisse inter Verginii auxilia Belgas, vereque reputantibus Galliam suismet viribus concidisse.⁶⁰

It is especially important that Civilis asks his listeners to not think about the battle-line of Vindex. The reasons for this are two-fold. Unlike Vocula, Civilis understands his listeners to have been participants in the battle. For them, the first association that would come with the mention of Vindex would have been the battle of Vesontio. His solution to the problem of ideological reinterpretation of history is to call attention to Vindex without conjuring his image. By saying

⁵⁷ Haynes, *The history of make-believe*, 155.

⁵⁸ Haynes, *The history of make-believe*, 155

⁵⁹ Haynes, *The history of make-believe*, 108, Master, *Provincial soldiers*, 50-51.

⁶⁰ Tacitus, *Histories*, IV.17.3:1-4.

“[n]e Vindicis aciem cogitarent,” he rhetorically constrains the associations that the memory of Vindex prompts to the military confrontation itself. Civilis’s goal is to present the Gallic experience as one of self-defeat but also of potential victory: “Galliam suismet viribus concidisse.” On the one hand, the Gauls who had supported Vindex had lost the battle of Vesontio against the Batavian cavalrymen. However, on the other, Civilis presents the opponents of Vindex as “Belgas”, not “Germanos.” In equating Verginius’s troops with Belgae and not with the Romans, Civilis wants to bring attention to the common experience of the two groups under Roman power. Thus, Civilis mentions the Battle of Vesontio, but negates its primary consequence — the presence of vanquished and victors. So, Civilis attempts to bring the Gauls back into the fold by shifting the focus of the narrative of Vesontio from one of German victors under Verginius and Gallic losers under Vindex to one that highlights the similarity between the two groups, the blurring of differences between the Gauls and Batavians, and the implication that, in some sense, the Gauls had actually been the victors of Vesontio.⁶¹ The result of the struggle at Vesontio is that there were Gauls on both sides of the aisle and that thus they would be able to be the victors in a revolt, led by Civilis, if only they set aside the cleavages between each other.

Functionally, the discourse of this speech is similar to the ultimatum given to the citizens of Cologne at IV.64.⁶² Whether or not Civilis had ulterior motives in playing down his possible role and support for Vindex during the rebellion⁶³ is not important for the implications of his speech. He succeeds in persuading his listeners that the Batavian revolt could be successful by

⁶¹ I would especially like to thank Professor Andrew Feldherr for offering advice on the formulation of this aspect of Civilis’s speech.

⁶² Tacitus, *Histories*, IV.64.

⁶³ If we accept Walser’s argument that “[j]edenfalls standen beide [Paulus and Civilis] in Verdacht, zur Bewegung des Vindex zu gehören, was in Anbetracht der Haltung der Batavikohorten als begründet erscheint.” See Gerold Walser, *Rom, das Reich und die fremden Völker in der Geschichtsschreibung der frühen Kaiserzeit: Studien zur Glaubwürdigkeit des Tacitus* (Baden-Baden, Germany: Verlag für Kunst und Wissenschaft, 1951), 89-90.

refashioning the events in recent memory into a narrative that prioritizes their common experiences under Roman power, highlights the consequences of their former divisions, and establishes the potential success of the future rebellion if only the Gauls decide to use their forces against their common enemy instead of against each other. This passage of Tacitus could be read also as a reversal of Lucan's *Pharsalia*.⁶⁴ Whereas in the *Pharsalia*, it is the Roman civil war that serves as a spectacle to the barbarian nations,⁶⁵ Tacitus creates the spectacle of Gallic blood being used by the Romans to suppress other provincials ("Provinciarum sanguine provincias vinci").⁶⁶ In this way, the ideology of the Batavian revolt becomes intertwined with the history of exploitation that Roman power represented in the Gallic regions, an exploitation, well documented by Jonathan Master in his monograph,⁶⁷ but it also serves to blur the differences between "Roman" and "Other."⁶⁸ If Roman civil war invites barbarian spectators and the Gallic "civil" war that culminated with the battle of Vesontio was spectated, directed, and used for the benefit of the Romans and not the Gauls, who had received rewards from Galba for their support of Vindex, then the solution to the Gauls' present troubles is simple: to side with Civilis, overthrow Roman rule, and establish a unified Gallic Empire, just as the Romans had become powerful with the end of the civil wars in the *Pharsalia*.⁶⁹ While Civilis's speech is successful in its purposes, the seeds of the defeat of the rebellion are sowed with the Gallic council at Rheims.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ This comparison was suggested to me by Professor Andrew Feldherr during our discussions on the argument over Civilis's speech.

⁶⁵ Lucan, *Pharsalia*, book I and especially I.10-14: "Cumque superba foret Babylon spolianda tropaeis/ Ausoniis umbraque erraret Crassus inulta./ Bella geri placuit nullos habitura triumphos?/ Heu, quantum terrae potuit pelagique parari/ Hoc quem civiles hauserunt sanguine dextrae..."

⁶⁶ Tacitus, *Histories*, IV.17.3.

⁶⁷ Master, *Provincial soldiers*, 138.

⁶⁸ I am indebted to Professor Feldherr for bringing up this point to me in our conversations.

⁶⁹ As hinted at Tacitus, *Histories*, IV.54 and then explicitly at IV.58-60 and IV.63

⁷⁰ Tacitus, *Histories*, IV.69.

The pan-Gallic reunion at Gaul was to decide whether all of Gaul would rise against Roman control or would support the Romans in the suppression of the Batavian revolt. The two primary participants of the discussion are the Treviran Julius Valentinus and the chieftain of the Remi Julius Auspex. Both figures carried the *nomen* of the Julian house, meaning the families of both had received Roman citizenship under Caesar, Octavian, Tiberius, or Caligula. This defines them both as liminal figures between Roman and barbarian identity, uniquely positioned, just as Civilis, to lead the debate about the future of Gaul. Because, as much as the debate deals with present events, its arguments are steeped in the past. Neither of the two figures uses arguments based on the events of the *Histories*. Galba, Vitellius, Vespasian, Civilis are all excluded from the discussion. Instead of a debate on proximate causes and effects of any pan-Gallic decision, the arguments are entirely based on both parties' interpretations of the past. On the one hand, Valentinus focuses on creating a "meditata oratione."⁷¹ His speech is not given in full by Tacitus, which is telling. Valentinus speaks with the usual invective language that is levied against empire. However, he fails to understand a very key implication of such an interpretation of Roman power: the Treviri and Lingones themselves were arguing for the creation of an *imperium Galliarum*. If empire was so tyrannic and the Gauls were to revolt against the Romans due to the exploitative and hypocritical nature of the empire, divulged by Vocula, then why were the Gauls themselves building one? While some answers to this question were presented by Civilis himself in his speech, as discussed above, Valentinus remains silent. This allowed for a breach in Civilis's ideological interpretation of the pan-Gallic memory. Auspex capitalizes immediately by mentioning Vindex's rebellion and reasserting the difference between the Gauls and Germans:

⁷¹ Tacitus, *Histories*, IV.69.5:4

At Iulius Auspex... vim Romanam pacisque bona dissertans et sumi bellum etiam ab ignavis, strenuissimi cuiusque periculo geri, iamque super caput legiones, sapientissimum quemque reverentia fideque, iuniores periculo ac metu constituit: et Valentini animum laudabant, consilium Auspiciis sequebantur. constat obstitisse Treveris Lingonibusque apud Gallias, quod Vindicis motu cum Verginio steterant.⁷²

The Gauls are immediately reminded of the privileges that they had received from the Romans (“pacisque bona”), that they had fought against Nero with Julius Vindex, and that they shared a general animosity with the Germans.⁷³ Immediately, the disagreements that were suppressed by Civilis are opened anew and the Treviri and Lingones are called to surrender and stop their rebellion.⁷⁴ This is also the reason for the narrator’s assessment in the next chapter: “Igitur non Treviri neque Lingones ceteraevae rebellium civitates pro magnitudine suscepti discriminis agere.”⁷⁵ The implications of the speech of Julius Auspex remain initially unclear to the Germans, who continue their rebellion. Concurrently, the armies of Quintus Petilius Cerialis advanced and conquered the lands of the revolting Treviri.⁷⁶ His speech and its aftermath, which close book IV, are the final attempt of the extant portions of the *Histories* to articulate a vision of the recent past that can create an imperial history to legitimate the newly established Flavian regime and that can integrate the Gauls into the narrative of the Roman Empire.

Petilius Cerialis’ speech⁷⁷ and its consequences are very rich in the ideological material, both for the things that it leaves unsaid as much as the things that it says about Roman ideology.

⁷² *Histories*, IV.69.1-2:3.

⁷³ Brunt, “The Revolt of Vindex,” 553 and Shotton, “Tacitus and Verginius Rufus,” 372.

⁷⁴ *Histories*, IV.69.3

⁷⁵ *Histories*, IV.70.1:1-2.

⁷⁶ *Histories*, IV.71-72.

⁷⁷ *Histories*, IV.73-74.

Notably, Cerialis attempts to “profess no difference between Romans and their conquered people”.⁷⁸ While both Master and Haynes use the speech to argue how much this distorts the real relationship between truth and ideology, this is precisely the point.⁷⁹ As we have seen throughout this paper, a single event can be molded by different lenses into a history that reflects different ideological conceptions, which can be successful, as long as they are internally consistent. As we have seen, the Gauls were already predisposed to viewing themselves within the general framework of Roman ideology due to their association with Vindex and the privileges that they received from Galba. To exploit this, Cerialis overrepresents the goods of Roman rule, such as the ability to “command their own legions within the Roman army, govern their own provinces, and in general share everything equally.”⁸⁰ Both Master and Haynes are correct to point out that Vindex was the only (at least known to us) governor of a Roman province.⁸¹ But the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. There might well have been other such figures that we do not know about. And even if we presume that Vindex was the first and only provincial to have risen to the high imperial ranks in the 1st century AD, he is omitted purposefully from the speech as “an exemplum Cerialis is unlikely to cite lest it would call attention to the instability of the Gallic provinces over the past several years”.⁸² This is not a trivial point. As we have seen, discussions of liminal figures could make or break interpretations of the events of the year AD 68. That Cerialis does not mention Vindex indicates two characteristics of Cerialis’s speech. Firstly, Cerialis is unwilling to risk Vocula’s mistake of failing to interpret Vindex in a way that might jeopardize his own survival. Secondly, he understands that any explicit mention of Vindex may problematize the

⁷⁸ Haynes, *The history of make-believe*, 170,

⁷⁹ Haynes, *The history of make-believe*, 170, Master, *Provincial soldiers*, 56.

⁸⁰ Haynes, *The history of make-believe*, 170,

⁸¹ Haynes, *The history of make-believe*, 170, Master, *Provincial soldiers*, 56.

⁸² Master, *Provincial soldiers*, 56.

reassertion of imperial control under the new Flavian dynasty in the absence of an alternative ideological interpretation of the events that led to and followed the death of Nero.

Vindex, the Gauls, and the Germans in revolt must be incorporated into an imperial history of the civil war by Vespasian to legitimate the Flavian regime. Until then, the task of Cerialis is to maintain the ideological status quo. Master's complaint that Cerialis's speech represents a "denial of reality" is thus made objectionable.⁸³ Who is it that determines reality and falseness? Which is the right interpretation of the past? These questions may seem to have an easy answer to us, from our modern vantage point, but they were not necessarily so in AD 69. The way that individuals were able to handle, reinterpret, and transform liminal figures to either confirm or disestablish imperial ideology, as we have seen, could be a question of life and death. Cerialis in this context preserved the ideological status quo, created by Julius Auspex at Rheims, which favored the Romans. It would be the work of the later regime, established by Vespasian, to work through the intricacies of Vindex's rebellion and to create an imperial ideology out of the bare event of the battle of Vesontio. It is a sad fact that this imperial interpretation of Vindex's rebellion is forever lost to us with the remainder of the *Histories*.

However, a final attempt was yet made to subvert the superiority of the Romans' ideological interpretation of Vindex's rebellion. The precedent of Vindex is evoked indirectly once more in a final attempt by the rebels to articulate an ideological history out of the events of the past year and thus legitimate their rebellion. Civilis and Classicus offered the crown of the

⁸³ Master, *Provincial soldiers*, 56.

Gallic Empire to Cerialis.⁸⁴ The similarity of the gesture to the offering of the imperial crown to Galba by Vindex has been noted by previous scholars.⁸⁵ This is not accidental. After Julius Auspex had deconstructed the historical interpretation of Civilis by reminding the Gauls of the benefits of Roman rule and their difference with the Germans, after their defeats in the field, the only thing that Civilis and Classicus could do to rescue their faltering rebellion was to imitate. If Cerialis would accept their offer, he would transform himself into a new Galba. Meanwhile, Civilis and Classicus would both become new “Vindices” and would so benefit from the ability to compare themselves to Vindex. In this way, Civilis and Classicus would have invited comparison, legitimacy, and thereby the power to reinterpret the past in an ideological discourse of the new Gallic Empire under Cerialis. However, Cerialis understands this and immediately, without saying a word, forwards the message to Domitian. Why did he not take their offer? Apart from the usual arguments of loyalty or fear (or both), there might also be an ideological motive here. If the Cerialis was to accept the crown of the Gallic Empire, he would become the embodiment of a new Galba. However, Galba was already dead due to his failure to articulate a vision for his reign. Therefore, Galba becomes an *exemplum* that Cerialis is not willing to imitate because imitating his example would also lead Cerialis to imitate his failure and his death.

As we have seen, different characters in the *Histories* attempted to reinterpret liminal figures and events that they had lived through into an interpretation of history that can legitimate their ideological positions. Therefore, Vindex becomes not only a mechanism for understanding the *Histories* but also Tacitus’s approach towards history more broadly. The figure of Vindex in

⁸⁴ *Histories*, IV.75.

⁸⁵ For example by Walser, *Rom, das Reich*, 120-121, Dieter Timpe, “L’insurrezione dei Batavi nell’interpretazione di Tacito,” in *Ripensando Tacito (e Ronald Syme): Storia e storiografia: Atti del Convegno Internazionale (Firenze, 30 novembre – 1 dicembre 2006)*, ed. Maria Antonietta Giua (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2007), 216.

the *Histories* demonstrates that individuals can create, alter, and remove ideological interpretations of history. As the figures of Civilis and Auspex attest, though, ideology need not have been created at the center of the empire, in Rome. In this way, Tacitus reveals another aspect of the *arcanum imperii*: since the emperor need not be made only in Rome, imperial history need not be made at Rome. Tacitus thus demonstrates the validity of history, created at the periphery, perhaps meanwhile creating a justification for his own history as an equestrian of Gallic origin. Tacitus also demonstrates that subjective factors like hate and love can shape and influence historical discourse. We can see this throughout the book in the relationships between Germans and Gauls. This opens new avenues of research into understanding Tacitus's approach to history, which can be elaborated on in further work on the topic. For this paper, we can see that, by studying the mentions and interpretations of Vindex by different actors in the *Histories*, we can gain an insight into Tacitus's view of the way events in the memory of individuals existing between the absolute ideals of "Roman" and "Barbarian" can be transformed by individual actors and by the institution of the principate into a historical narrative that perpetuates or subverts the dominant discourse of empire.

In the course of this paper, we have seen how different figures in Tacitus's *Histories* interpret the events of Julius Vindex's rebellion. Galba, Vocula, Vitellius, Civilis, Auspex, and Cerialis all pronounce their interpretation of Vindex by mentioning or ignoring him in their speeches. However, the death of Nero, as we have seen and as Haynes's brilliant monograph demonstrates, opened a gap in imperial ideology that required a refashioning. A historical justification had to be given for legitimating the continued existence of the Principate. But this ideological history could not ignore the fact that Vindex's rebellion happened. Vindex is both the root and example of the problem of the blurring of the identities between "Self" and "Other",

“Roman” and “Gaul.” In one sense, he was the one who caused this crisis of imperial legitimacy by revoking Nero’s imperium and assigning it to Galba. But also, he was not the only problem that caused the civil wars of AD 69. He exemplifies deeper-rooted conflicts concerning the identity of non-Italic peoples and Germanic auxiliaries, their rights, and their (mis-)treatment by Roman power, as has been argued by Jonathan Master.⁸⁶ Galba, Vocula, and Vitellius fail in maintaining themselves in power because they failed to incorporate Vindex into a narrative of imperial history that is internally consistent. Civilis, on the one hand, and Auspex and Cerialis, on the other, learned their lesson and attempted to give an interpretation of this rebellion that can serve their respective ideological goals. Civilis tried to reinterpret the implications of Vindex without calling attention to him, which is why he is successful, for a time. Auspex makes use of the contradictions that Julius Valentinus opened in the narrative of imperial ideology that Civilis created to restore the Gauls to the Roman side. Finally, Cerialis preserved, by tacitly removing Vindex from his imperial history and by not accepting the crown of the Gallic Empire, the ideological status quo that Auspex created and that favored the Romans until Vespasian himself became able to reinterpret, supplement, or supplant this ideology of empire, thus establishing the policy of his regime towards notions like “Self” and “Other”. Memory is molded by different actors into a historical narrative that serves to perpetuate or disestablish imperial ideology. Whether or not the “real” Vindex was just the commander of a legion, a pathway of the Gauls to Roman citizenship, or an example of Roman divide and conquer tactics is not what is important. What is key is that Tacitus shows us what the task of the historian is during the imperial regime: to make careful choices about their interpretation of the memory of past events, because their histories will serve to either legitimate or delegitimize the regimes that they serve or oppose. What Tacitus’s choice was and whether he

⁸⁶ Master, *Provincial soldiers*

was successful in accomplishing his ideological agenda with the creation of the *Histories* is not for me to judge. This represents my own work in accordance with University regulations.

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